**A** **HOUSE RESOLUTION**

TO RECOGNIZE AND CELEBRATE CHAMPION TENNIS PLAYER ALTHEA GIBSON, A NATIVE OF CLARENDON COUNTY, FOR HER OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE WORLD OF PROFESSIONAL TENNIS.

Whereas, born on August 25, 1927, in Silver, Althea Gibson was the daughter of Daniel and Annie Bell Gibson of Clarendon County, who worked as sharecroppers on a cotton farm. The Great Depression hit rural Southern farmers sooner than it did much of the rest of the country, so in 1930 the family moved to New York City’s Harlem, where Althea’s three sisters and brother were born; and

Whereas, the young Althea grew up in New York City, where she began playing tennis at an early age under the auspices of the New York Police Athletic League. In 1941, she won her first tournament, which was sponsored by the American Tennis Association (ATA), an organization founded by African‑American players. In 1947, she captured the ATA’s women’s singles championship, which she would hold for ten consecutive years; and

Whereas, while attending Tallahassee’s Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, where she earned her bachelor’s degree in 1953, she continued to play in tournaments around the country and in 1950 became the first black tennis player to enter the national grass‑court championship tournament at Forest Hills in Queens, New York. The next year, she entered the Wimbledon tournament, again as the first black player ever invited. The tall and lean Gibson soon became noted for her dominating serves and powerful play; and

Whereas, until 1956, Althea had achieved only fair success in match tennis play, but that year she won a number of tournaments in Asia and Europe, including the French and Italian singles titles and the women’s doubles title at Wimbledon. In 1957‑1958, she won the Wimbledon women’s singles and doubles titles and took the U.S. women’s singles championship at Forest Hills. She also won the U.S. mixed doubles and the Australian women’s doubles in 1957; and

Whereas, that same year, she was voted Female Athlete of the Year by the Associated Press, thereby becoming the first African American to receive the honor. She also won the award the following year; and

Whereas, having worked her way to top ranking in world amateur tennis, she turned professional following her 1958 Forest Hills win. However, there being few tournaments and prizes for women at that time, she took up professional golf in 1964 and was the first African‑American member of the Ladies Professional Golf Association. From 1973 to 1992, Althea Gibson was active in sports administration, mainly for the state of New Jersey. Her autobiography, *I Always Wanted to Be Somebody*, appeared in 1958. In 1971, she was elected to the International Tennis Hall of Fame; and

Whereas, Althea once wrote of herself, “I knew that I was an unusual, talented girl, through the grace of God. I didn’t need to prove that to myself. I only wanted to prove it to my opponents”; and

Whereas, as an African‑American tennis star, she pioneered the way for tennis and golf greats such as Arthur Ashe, Venus and Serena Williams, and Tiger Woods. She passed away on September 28, 2003, in East Orange, New Jersey; and

Whereas, the House of Representatives takes great pleasure in commending Althea Gibson for her distinguished career in professional tennis and in saluting her as an inspiration to the athletes who have followed in her footsteps and benefited from her trailblazing accomplishments. Now, therefore,

Be it resolved by the House of Representatives:

That the members of the South Carolina House of Representatives, by this resolution, recognize and celebrate champion tennis player Althea Gibson, a native of Clarendon County, for her outstanding achievements in the world of professional tennis.

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